

****ATTENTION****

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Washington Department of Wildlife



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SOUTHEAST WASHINGTON

UPLAND BIRD HUNTING

Success in upland bird hunting in southeast Washington — which includes pheasant, quail, Hungarian and chukar partridge — can vary from year to year, depending on how weather conditions affect populations. Because of these fluctuations, a 2-1/2-month season that opens in mid-October is fairly traditional; check current hunting rules pamphlet for dates.

Mild winters and warm, dry springs during the late '70s allowed most species to boom. Then, a series of severe winters, followed by poor nesting conditions (cold, wet springs), resulted in declines for most species in the early '80s. With some breaks in seasonal weather conditions, some populations began rebuilding in the mid-'80s. But a return to severe weather conditions by the late '80s, particularly the "arctic blast" of February 1989, dropped numbers once more, leaving upland game bird

hunting only fair to marginally good in some areas.

Successful hunting tends to be on private lands, but public lands — including the Department of Wildlife's Chief Joseph, Grouse Flats and Wooten Wildlife Areas — can be productive, too.

Among upland birds, pheasant are the most vulnerable to changing weather conditions. Broodstock don't fare well in long periods of heavy snow and cold winds, and newly-hatched chicks are especially susceptible to cool, rainy conditions (which seem to be more the rule than the exception in eastern Washington around late May and early June at the peak of pheasant hatch.) Birds are most consistently found in Whitman, Walla Walla, Columbia and Garfield counties. The best hunting tends to be on private lands with good pheasant cover and food, particularly river bank areas, like along the breaks of

the Snake, Walla Walla and Touchet rivers.

Chukar populations vary also due mostly to shifting weather conditions and other factors. Although broodstock numbers were low after several severe winters, chukar production rose enough in the mid-'80s to allow higher bag limits in those parts of Asotin and Garfield counties where the season opens earlier (see current hunting rules pamphlet for details.) Recent weather conditions have caused only minor drops in those populations. The best hunting is near water where chukar tend to concentrate during dry, warm weather. Such areas are found along the Snake River between the mouth of the Grande Ronde River and Little Goose Dam and along the breaks of the Grande Ronde River.

Hungarian partridge numbers have remained more stable. Good hunting is found in draws

UPLAND BIRD HUNTING

and canyons near wheatfields. Whitman County and the breaks of the Snake River in Garfield and Asotin counties provide the best hunting.

California quail nest slightly higher than other species, and are less susceptible to poor weather conditions in the spring. But, they are also more vulnerable to severe winter con-

ditions. Excellent production in one year can be offset by winter kill in another. That has been the case in the most recent years, leaving quail numbers down overall. Hunters usually find good quail hunting in thickly vegetated areas — along most streams and rivers in the southeastern counties.

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